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ABSTRACT

The suggestions for writing for publication given in this paper include writing with honesty, thinking clearly, considering the potential audience, sharing the article with friends, revising the article, and sending the article to the appropriate journal. Empathy for the difficulty of writing is given and illustrated with examples from Eric Hoffer, Ernest Hemingway, Art Buchwald, Chaim Potok, and others. (MKM)

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HOW TO WRITE AN ARTICLE FOR PUBLICATION

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> "I could hang onto an idea for years. I could chew on a sentence for months.... All that I have accomplished is that I have written a few good sentences.... The good sentences that I have written are going to stay. They have staying power. I love a good sentence."
>
> --Eric Hoffer in the 90-minute documentary, Eric Hoffer: The Crowded Life, PBS, January 17, 1978

Some people say that writing helps you think clearly. The evidence is not that clearcut--unless you call putting down words and moving them from one place to another thinking. It's far more likely that clear thinking precedes clear writing. Albert Einstein's writing is crystal clear.

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About thinking, Louis Brandeis, the great Supreme Court Justice of the United States, once observed: "Human nature, like the inanimate, seeks the path of least resistance. To think hard and persistently is painful."

To think hard and persistently one needs time and space. Jack Schaefer wrote Shane between the hours of midnight and two. George Gershwin captured the pulsating rhythms of New York City in his classic Rhapsody in Blue while he was in the Catskill Mountains.

You, too, need quiet. You cannot be afraid of silence. Ernest Hemingway has written of the loneliness of the writer, and how, as his fame grows, his loneliness lessens, and the writing worsens.

Let's imagine that you have time and space to be alone to feel and think. You are moved by something--a person, an idea, an encounter, a melody. You want to share your honest feelings thoughtfully.

Honest, of course, is the key. Whether in its old meaning--pure and chaste as the word meant in Shakespeare's time--or what the word means in our time--no person can write powerfully without writing honestly.

Yet if you read any of the guides to writing for periodicals--read all of them--you'll be lucky to find one word about writing honestly.

But we all know that you may come across a piece of writing--in the most unexpected place--from the most unexpected person--that shines like a gem. If you want to read good, clear, honest writing, read Red Smith's sports column in The New York Times. Read the "Talk of the Town" section in The New Yorker. Read Art Buchwald's

column in newspapers across the country.

Writing honestly means writing to communicate. It does not mean writing for money, or for promotion, or for tenure, or for a better job. These will materialize; I do not underplay their value. I do agree with Samuel Johnson who declared, "Anyone who writes and doesn't write for money is a fool." I also agree with Ernest Hemingway. When asked what he thought about people who wrote for money, he replied, "Every whore will eventually find her vocation."

You have the time and space and feelings and thoughts and you're writing away honestly. What now? You're writing for somebody. It's a rare person who keeps secret diaries these days. This is not the eighteenth century, the time when James Boswell wrote his London journal, the work that scholars knew of but thought was gone forever. You recall how scholars saw mention of the famous journal but could not make out the fourth letter of the word: burned or buried. Since the journal was not seen for more than a century, they assumed the journal had been burned until it was found in an attic in London. Even Boswell, though, wrote to be read, and we all know his great biography--perhaps the greatest biography ever written--The Life of Samuel Johnson.

Who will read your writing? Friends? Neighbors? Relatives? Children? Teachers? Professors? Thinking of your audience takes courage for stage fright, a common affliction even among actors, can be more frightening when your audience is unseen. It takes a great deal of courage to expose yourself--in a very real sense your inner self--to people you cannot see and may not know. There is a striking sentence in Chaim Potok's best selling novel, The Chosen. Toward the end of the novel, Danny's father, a great scholar who has led a community of Hasidic Jews to New York City from the ravages of Europe, talks to Danny's boyfriend, Reuven. He speaks of Reuven's father, a teacher and writer. "In your father's writings I

looked at his soul, not his mind." To strip yourself bare is something that few people want to do. It is for that reason that so many people in education write in the third person passive voice and call it objectivity.

Your writing is finished. What now? Read it over, now or later. Do you really need those beginning paragraphs? Or were they warmup? Do you really need the final paragraphs? Or were they warmdown? Examine everything that you have written; cut out what you can. Respect your readers; their time is as important as yours, so don't make them wade through unnecessary verbiage.

Before sending your article, share what you have written with your friends. What do they think? Does it hold their interest? Is it clear? Concise? Compact? What they say will be useful. Listen. Don't be defensive.

Hemingway said that he read The Old Man and the Sea more than one hundred times and made changes each time before he sent it out for publication.

Where do you send your article (which, incidentally, is protected from the moment of creation)? Send it to the periodical read by the people you wrote it for. Many fine articles are sent to the wrong publication, resulting in delay. Remember that English teachers read English journals and reading teachers read reading journals. Secondary school teachers read journals for the secondary school, and elementary school teachers read journals for the elementary school. Administrators read journals for administrators, and teacher educators read journals like English Education.

Remember that the word publication springs from the Latin word publicāre, to make public. Know your public.

Know your publication. Know its style and flavor. Know the name of its editor. Send the specified number of copies of your article in the manner requested. Enclose stamps or international postal coupons. Then sit back and wait pleasantly.

Within a few weeks you'll receive an acknowledgment. Within a few months you'll learn the fate of your article. If it is accepted, you and your friends will read it in a year. If it is not, keep trying: keep practicing; it takes years to become a pianist, a violinist, an artist. Why should we feel it takes less time to become a writer?